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בס"ד

Parashat Ki Tabo Part II

Articulation of the Covenant: הַאֲמִירָה and הַאֲמָרָה

1. Introduction

Upon having concluded the *misvot* section with an appropriate closing (Deut. 11:22-25) and with a brief reference to the blessings and curses ceremony, Moses had promptly introduced the *huqim* and *mishpatim* legislation (11:32 ff.). Now, in 26:16, Moses furnishes the “bookends” to this latter portion of the law compendium by paraphrasing and expanding 11:32, the verse that introduced the *huqim* and *mishpatim*. With the stipulations complete, in the next three verses (26:17-19) he brings the covenant reenactment to its climax by articulating its most essential features (the topic of this discussion) and then provides the details about the future ceremony of blessings and curses, which he had made reference to in chapter 11.

In asserting the most essential features of the covenant, Moses summarized the basic responsibilities of both parties (a most appropriate matter following the lengthy elaboration of stipulations). He proclaimed that on that day G-d and Israel each accepted the other as a contracting party in a mutual relationship of great import and intimacy. Israel’s fulfillment of the laws and wholehearted commitment to them was its indispensable condition. For His part, G-d pledged to make Israel His treasured people and to exalt it above the other nations in praise, renown and glory in order that it may be His holy people.

Of course Israel had already accepted Hashem as its G-d and He took Israel as His people almost forty years previously, at the time of revelation. And the associated details presented here repeat many of the details of that event with a number of similar terms. However, a covenant reaffirmation is comparable to an original contracting ceremony and the essential particulars are reasserted anew. When upon the discovery of the *Sefer Torah* in the temple in the late seventh century B.C.E. King Josiah “cut” the

covenant with the people (2 Kings 23:3), most of the key terms employed there parallel those of our passage.

The mutuality of the G-d-Israel relationship is highlighted through reciprocal use of two most unusual verbal clauses that employ a term unique to this context. Israel’s action is described as אָתָּה ה' הַאֲמָרָה (v. 17) while Hashem’s is denoted as נְהַי ה' הַאֲמִירָה (v. 18).

2. Survey of Interpretations

What is the precise meaning of הַאֲמָרָה and הַאֲמִירָה? These verbs appear to be in the *hiph'il* mode, which generally indicates active causation, although some commentators point out that in certain contexts such a form is employed to denote intensification of an action. We will survey some of the classical views, followed by the comments of Rabbi S. D. Sassoon.

Rashi: There is no decisive proof from Scripture. It appears to mean, “You separated Him from the other gods to be your G-d; He separated you from the other nations to be His.” (Many have pointed out that this interpretation lacks a linguistic foundation. It may have been influenced by *Targum Jonathan*, which in turn was influenced by *Targum Onqelos*, possibly based on a misunderstanding, a matter about which we will soon comment.)

Rashi on Talmud (*b. Ber.* 6a, etc.): The א-מ-ר root, (“speak”) here means praised or glorified, similar to יִתְאָמְרוּ כָּל פְּעֻלֵי אֲנֹן, “the evildoers glorify themselves” (Ps. 94:4).

Ibn Ezra: You caused Him to be exalted [in the world], related to בְּרָאשׁ אָמִיר, “on the topmost branch” (Isa. 17:6).

Yehuda Halevi, Rashbam: These verbs are the causative form of “said.” “Your worthy deportment in accepting the commandments and making a commitment to fulfill them prompted Him to say that He is your G-d; His doings gave you cause to say you are committed to be His people.”

Targum Onqelos: חָטַבְךָ and חָטַבְתָּ. (In its most popular usage, “to chop” or “cut.”) We will return to this shortly.

Targum Jonathan: Israel made G-d חָטַבְתָּ אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם, “a unique entity in the world,” and G-d did the same for Israel (also see *b. Ber.* 6a, etc.: חָטַבְתָּ אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם). Obviously, this is based on the Aramaic translation of *Targum Onqelos* of חָטַבְתָּ and חָטַבְךָ, but taking חָטַב in its common meaning of “chop, carve out,” and referring it to the object carved out. However, in this sense it does not seem to have any relationship to the אמר root.

Hertz Commentary: Probably technical legal term(s) by which each of the two parties to a covenant made the other utter a declaration of his obligation under it.

NJPS: “affirmed,” with a note “exact nuance of Hebrew uncertain.”

Malbim, Torah Temimah: These words are related to the talmudic מֵאָמַר (*m. Yeb.* 2:1, etc.), a procedure that establishes an engagement relationship in a leviratical case wherein one of the brothers gave the *yebama* money to secure their relationship. Such a transaction possesses rabbinic status in designating her for him and prohibiting her to the other brothers, although it does not finalize the levirate marriage, since the law recognizes only sexual intimacy as the mechanism for that. In our context the metaphor would be describing the G-d-Israel relationship being forged as one similar to betrothal (אֵירוּסִין).

As concerns *Targum Onqelos*’s translation of חָטַבְתָּ, Jastrow’s *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature* (p. 447, entry: חָטַב), renders it “betroth one’s self to” and cites the Targum of our verse. In a related entry he cites a connection to the Arabic and the meaning of “to woo.” (Although from a different root and perhaps irrelevant, in colloquial Arabic a meaning of חָטַב [here

spelled as it is pronounced], analogous to the Aramaic חָטַבְתָּ*, means “got engaged to be married.”) This translation suits the context well. Since it is rarely attested in rabbinic literature with this meaning, it may be that the author of *Targum Jonathan* did not so understand *Targum Onqelos* and was forced into a *midrashic* interpretation of the word חָטַבְתָּ.

The clauses אָתָּה ה' הָאֱמִירָךְ and וְה' הָאֱמִירָךְ read more smoothly as causative than as intensifications. In the latter sense, they do not translate well as forms of “said” or “affirmed” because they would not then be articulating in themselves the substance of what was being done to deserve use of the *hiph'il* form. Neither does “caused to say” fit the context well, since the words that follow the key verbal phrase do not at all express what was said; rather, they describe an aspect of the relationship that is accepted as a responsibility by the party doing the action (אָתָּה ה' הָאֱמִירָךְ הַיּוֹם לְהִיּוֹת לְךָ (וְה' הָאֱמִירָךְ הַיּוֹם לְהִיּוֹת לּוֹ לְעַם סְגֻלָּהּ and וְלִלְכֹת בְּדַרְכֵי). In the *Onqelos-Malbim-Torah Temimah* interpretation the key words denote the actual accomplishment of a betrothal-like relationship between the two parties. In addition, use of the same unusual word indicates that the “action” of each side was performed with the understanding that it will affect the action of the other party. This seems to fit the context best.

The Mandelkern Hebrew and Aramaic Biblical Concordance (p. 129) also proposes that the root meaning of חָטַבְתָּ is “betrothal.” In his שְׂאֵרָה entry (p. 154), Mandelkern speculates [bearing in mind the interchangeability of *sheen-seen-samakh*] that perhaps the word *erusin* (“betrothal”) is related to אֲרֻשָׁתוֹ שְׂפִתָיו (“request of his lips”) of Psalm 21:3, (“request” being a nuance of “utterance”). In that verse it would correspond to תַּאֲוַת לְבוֹ (“his heart’s desire”) and accordingly אֲרֻשָׁתוֹ might originally have been “the girl spoken for” in a marriage context, such as בְּיוֹם שְׂפִתָּי בָּהּ (“on the day she is spoken for” [Song 8:8]). The latter statements appear quite conjectural.

3. Rabbi Sassoon’s Comments

Rabbi S. D. Sassoon regarded the betrothal translation correct and considered our Deuteronomy passage to be the frame of reference for G-d’s later declaration (in a time of estrangement from Israel) that in days to come He intends to betroth Israel forever, וְאֲרֻשְׁתִּיךָ לִי (Hos. 2:21-22). Not only do both these passages portray establishment of an intimate

relationship between G-d and Israel that may be compared to that of betrothal, but an accurate understanding of key words reveals striking correspondences. (The standard word for betrothal – *erusin* – may have been inappropriate for the Deuteronomy context because it is the male partner who does the act of betrothing while the female agrees [הָאִשָּׁה יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה], “When a man takes a wife”), whereas in contracting a covenant both sides do the action together. In Hosea, it is G-d proclaiming what He intends to do with Israel in the future.)

The following is drawn from the rabbi’s unpublished manuscripts and from a lecture he delivered.

G-d’s proclamation in Hosea’s prophecy that He will betroth Israel, in the language of a different age, reflects Moses’ הָאִשָּׁה יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה statement of G-d and Israel entering into a betrothal-like relationship. The Hosea passage associates with the G-d-Israel relationship virtually the identical attributes and particulars that Moses expressed as being the chief elements of Israel’s commitment to Him in the Deuteronomy passage. The four objects in the הָאִשָּׁה יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה series parallel the four segments of the הָאִשָּׁה יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה verse. The details of G-d’s actions that are depicted in the Hosea passage expound the particulars of Moses’ description of Israel’s commitments, typical of the prophets’ utilization of reversal when they paraphrase and allude to other biblical sources. A surface translation of these phrases in textual order follows:

In the הָאִשָּׁה יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה verse: a) that He will be your G-d; b) that you go in His ways; c) that you observe His statutes, commands and ordinances; and d) that you hearken to His voice.

In the הָאִשָּׁה יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה passage: a) forever; b) with righteousness, justice, kindness and compassion; c) with faith, and d) you shall know Hashem.

Following a chiasm structure, the first of the Hosea series, לְעוֹלָם (forever), corresponds to the last of the *he'emarta* group, וְלִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹלוֹ, on the surface translated as, “to hearken to His voice.” Particularly in our context, “hearken to His voice” does not appear to simply be another way of saying to “obey His commands.” If that was the meaning it could not logically follow the full range of commitments previously expressed in the verse, which already cover all the areas that the clause might theoretically have

referred to. This is especially the case here where the conjunctive *vav* (“and”), is used, which adds “and hearken to His voice” as an additional category. This precludes the otherwise possible interpretation that it is merely restating in different words the preceding items. What, then, is the precise meaning of this phrase?

The Sifre (Deut. 13:5), elaborated by Ramban, explains that “to hearken to His voice” refers to heeding the prophets who speak in G-d’s name throughout the generations (hopefully, evermore). His voice reaches Israel through His messengers. The normal, ongoing relationship of Israel with G-d was to include a prophet who speaks in His name: “A prophet from your midst, from among your brethren, like myself, Hashem your G-d will raise up for you, to him shall you hearken” (אֶלְוֵי תִשְׁמָעוּן [Deut 18:15]). This is in accordance with the people’s request at revelation for a prophetic intermediary, when they said: לֹא אֶסָּף לִשְׁמֹעַ אֶת קוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֵי...לֹא אָמוּת (“Let me not continue to hear the voice of Hashem my G-d...that I not die” [v. 16]). Regarding the prophet, G-d states: “I shall place my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (v. 18). The person who resists is described as אִשָּׁר לֹא יִשְׁמַע אֶל דְּבַרֵי אֱשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר בְּשֵׁמי (“[one] who does not hearken to My words that he speaks in My name” [v. 19]).

The second phrase in the Hosea passage is בְּצִדְקָה וּבְרַחֲמִים וּבְיָדָיִם וּבְחַסְדֵּי וּבְיָדָיִם (“with righteousness and justice and kindness and compassion”). This refers to the second phrase in the *he'emarta* verse, לְלַכּת בְּדַרְכֵי, (“to walk in His ways”). (Due to internal logic, the Hosea passage cites the Deuteronomy phrases in a 4-2-1-3 pattern, a chiasm variant.) “The way of Hashem” (דַּרְכֵי ה') is defined in the Torah in G-d’s statement regarding Abraham’s qualities, “that he will instruct his children and posterity to keep the way of Hashem to do righteousness and justice” (צִדְקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט [Gen. 18:19]). Hence, “to walk in His ways” connotes performing acts of righteousness and justice.

Some biblical descriptions of Hashem’s attributes and the basic values He seeks in man cite “righteousness and justice” while in others *hesed* (“kindness”) is also attested: “But let him who chooses to be praised be praised in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am Hashem who does *hesed*, *mishpat* and *sedaqah* in the earth, for in these do I desire declares Hashem” (Jer. 9:23). “What is it Hashem requires of

you, only to do *mishpat*, love *hesed*, and walk modestly with your G-d” (Mic. 6:8). On occasion Hashem adds *rahamim* (“compassion”) to the behavior He desires: “Execute true *mishpat* and do *hesed* and *rahamim*” (Zech. 7:9). Here, in reflecting Moses’ בְּדַרְכָּיו לְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכָּיו, which was part of an expansive statement, all four words are deployed.

Third in Hosea’s betrothal passage is בְּאֵמוּנָה (“with faith and trust”). This connotes one relying on Hashem as his patron or champion in life, his mighty one who provides his needs and fights his battles. This is the meaning of the first object in the *he'emarta* verse, לְהִיּוֹת לְךָ לְאֱלֹהִים (literally, “that He shall be your G-d”). This is not an abstract generality but connotes relationship. When Jacob vowed, “If G-d will be with me, protect me on this journey I am taking, provide me bread to eat and clothing to wear ... then Hashem shall be for me *Elokim*” (Gen. 28:21), the latter clause does not merely mean that at that point “Hashem will be my G-d.” Rather, at that point Jacob would live his life with complete trust in Hashem as his champion. (If the “Hashem shall be for me *Elokim*” clause is part of the protasis [the “if” portion of his vow], it would be a summary of the previous clauses and mean “if Hashem will have been my champion,” then the statement of his commitments begins.) Thus, when Moses said לְהִיּוֹת לְךָ לְאֱלֹהִים it refers to one trusting in G-d as his champion and that is what Hosea means.

The וְיָדַעְתָּ אֶת ה' passage concludes with וְיָדַעְתָּ אֶת ה' (literally, “and you shall know Hashem”). However, especially when used in relation to Hashem, יָדַע often has the meaning of “to be devoted to,” “to care for” or “to love.” In Psalm 91:14, כִּי יָדַע שְׁמִי (“for he knows My name”) corresponds to כִּי בִי הִשְׁתַּק (“for in Me he desires”). In Psalm 1:6, the clause “For Hashem knows (יָדַע) the way of the righteous” contrasts with “the way of the wicked will be destroyed” and basically means “Hashem cares for the righteous.” In Amos 3:2, Hashem’s statement, “You alone יָדַעְתָּ

from all the families of the earth” cannot mean “know,” but must take one of the other meanings. In Psalm 36:11, in the phrase מִשֶּׁךְ תְּסַדֵּךְ לְיִדְעֶיךָ (NJPS: “Bestow Your faithful care on those devoted to You”), יִדְעֶיךָ corresponds to יִשְׁרֵי לֵב (“upright”) in the parallel portion of the verse. This latter verse appears to be based on Deuteronomy 7:9, which explicitly mentions “those who love Him,” שְׂמֵר הַבְּרִית וְהַסֵּד לְאֱהָבָיו וְלִשְׂמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתָיו.

Thus, יָדַעְתָּ אֶת ה' denotes being devoted to Hashem, being committed to His precepts, and the fourth segment of Hashem’s proclamation in Hosea corresponds to the third הָאֲמַרְתָּ clause: “that you will observe His statutes, commandments and ordinances.”

Having a Torah passage in which the covenant relationship is modeled on a bridegroom’s betrothal of his bride adds richness to the concept and provides background for some statements of the prophets. How could Hosea admonish the Israelites, “Rebuke your mother for she is not my wife and I am not her husband?” (Hos. 2:4), if the betrothal itself was not previously contracted? His audience could protest that such a relationship was never established. Other prophets also use the marriage metaphor for the G-d-Israel relationship, implying it had been well-established imagery from long before (see Jer. 2:2; 3:1; Ezek. 16:8).

Endnote

* Such association between the Hebrew-Aramaic כ (h) and the Arabic sound of *khaf* is common (again, here written as pronounced, sometimes requiring a prefix): *hamisha* (five) – *khamseh*; *hasa* (lettuce) – *khaseh*; *habuy* (hidden) – *m'khaba*; *harab* (destroyed) – *kharab*.